

I'M HERE BECAUSE I QUALIFY: STRATEGIES OF SUCCESSFUL FEMALE ACADEMICS

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Background

- Part of larger PhD study
 - Successful women in academia, politics and trade
 - Experiences
 - Strategies
- Participants
 - 8 PhDs, 2 Masters Degrees.
 - 7 above 40 years, 3 under 40 years
 - 8 married, 1 widowed, 1 not married



Introduction

- Globally, combining domestic and professional responsibilities has posed great challenges for men and women (O'Laughlin & Bischoff 2005).
- Gender contract in Ghanaian and African societies (Kuenyehia, 1995).
- Challenges include conditioning (socialization) to:
 - Good wife
 - Good mother
 - Keep the home
- Total institutions of family and Universities



Introduction

- The University is a gendered institution. It is a difficult terrain for women. They have to navigate carefully, and also meet society's expectations of them as women
- The many things they have to do on a daily basis to achieve a work-life balance and attain success in their careers are often outside the purview of society and the many girls who take these women as role models. It is therefore important to discuss the experiences of some women in academia, highlighting the different ways through which they built resilience and self-efficacy to attain the successes they are enjoying in their careers and homes.



The Strengths Perspective

- This perspective aims at uncovering the client's strengths and hope, and putting them into action, as opposed to the traditional deficit-focused approach
- Broad applicability across a number of practice settings and a wide range of populations, but more especially for use with vulnerable groups



Key principles of the Strengths Perspective

- **Resilience** – skills & abilities that accumulate over time as people struggle to surmount adversity and meet challenges
- **Empowerment** – assisting individuals, families and communities in discovering and using the resources and tools within and around them
- **Membership** – being responsible and valued members of a viable group or community
- (Saleebey, 1996)



Methodology

- Method
 - ❖ In-depth interviews
 - Study Population
 - ❖ Women in Academia
 - Sampling Procedure
 - ❖ Purposive sampling
 - Data Collection
 - ❖ In-depth Interviews
- Thematic Analysis



Common Challenges

- Gender stereotyping - Women feel constrained and often struggle for belonging in male dominated work environments (Tyler & Cohen, 2010)
- Non-existent mentors
- No or few ineffective networks
- Time constraints



Strategies for Success # 1

- Asserting Rights
 - Assertiveness is a skill that is valued among leaders and required for success in any given field.
 - However, African women are not expected to be assertive; rather, an ideal woman is one who is seen to be “submissive, passive and gentle” (Onyeizugbo, 2003, p. 12)



Asserting Rights

- *Sometimes, we go for meetings and I'm the only woman there, but I don't keep quiet because of that. I believe that the man was invited to be there because he qualified to be there, and so was I. So, if I have something to say, I would say it and not feel intimidated by anybody. **I let them know that I'm here because I qualify** (Boatema, Head of Pharmacy).*
- *You come across males who try to disregard your achievements. So you find yourself constantly having to fight, but you learn to choose your battles, it's not everything that you have to face up to and spend time on. Choose your battles, I mean sometimes you have to tell them straight in the face that "you can't do this. Why are you treating me this way? If I were a male, even at my age, you still wouldn't do that", and face up to them (Naa, Head of Department, Arts).*



Strategy #2

- Work-life balance
 - defined as the ‘satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home’. Being able to combine both paid and unpaid work in ways that are comfortable for the person.
- The two greedy institutions – academia and family – are time consuming and require women to stretch themselves to meet the demands of each institution
 - (Currie, Thiele & Lewis, 2002).



Balancing work and family life

- *You know, you can't do all the work in the office. Sometimes you take exam scripts home to grade, and sometimes you read your students dissertations at home. But then, you also can't ignore your husband and the children because of work, so what I do is that I devote my time and attention to them when I get home, until everybody goes to sleep, then I sit up and do the work that I have to do. It means I don't get enough sleep, but tell me of any mother you know who ever gets enough sleep (Akosua, Head of Department, Science).*
- *There are times when I have to attend a conference somewhere so I would plan and squeeze a family vacation into it, if we can afford it. I would attend with my children and sometimes with my husband too if he has the time from work. I mean, it's not easy, financially and all, but it affords us the opportunity to spend some time together, even though I'm "away", and ensures that they don't miss me too much; because I tell you, between conferences, workshops and regular work, I'm almost always away from home (Naa, Head of Department, Arts).*



Strategy # 3

- Mentors and Social Networks
 - Adusah-Karikari (2008) and Prah (2004) among others have written extensively about the importance of mentors and social networks in academia.

One cannot live in isolation in academia and expect to thrive. Through collaboration and team work, some faculty members have had the opportunity to conduct research, publish articles, and have secured publication contracts, thereby facilitating their progression in academia



Mentors and Social Networks

- *Over the years, I've learnt to build networks and support systems that have proven quite helpful. There are people you can call when you have challenges in your work and they will give you all the mentoring and support you need. I think women do not make much use of networks in their careers, but when you learn to do that, you go places (Linda, Registrar, Arts).*
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- *The social networks the men have on campus, we [the women] don't have even a quarter of it. They meet to play tennis, share a few drinks, discuss issues at a more informal level and look out for each other. But we the women, we only go to work, close and go home, so sometimes things are a bit tough for us, but if you have a friend, a mentor or someone you can always go to, it helps a great deal (Betty, Senior Lecturer, Biological science).*



Concluding Thoughts

- *It's about time we women learned to be our sisters' keepers. Too many times we hear that women are their own enemies, but I think we can turn that around and help each other out. We the seniors need to mentor the junior ones. If we had mentors when we started our careers, we wouldn't be where we are now, so we need to help the up and coming ones. Sometimes just being a friend and providing advice every now and then is all that one needs to make it in this environment (Boatemaa, Head of Department, Pharmacy).*



Concluding Thoughts

- The experiences of these research participants from three public universities is a reflection of endemic systemic and cultural values that place women in a subordinate position to men. Although the study participants attributed their success to personal empowerment and characteristics which included resilience, determination, taking responsibility, embodying strength and self-confidence, the challenges and negative experiences they went through in the course of their careers could be crippling for other women.



Concluding Thoughts

- Going forward, it is critical that such biases are done away with in families, workplaces and society as a whole. To achieve this, social workers in Ghana need to mobilize to bring awareness and knowledge of the structures, inequalities, and oppression that combine to marginalize women in modern-day academe in Ghana. This can be done in a number of ways: through education and consciousness-raising; forming and keeping of social networks among women; and galvanizing support for broad-based organizing around female-friendly policies within universities.

